

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5584

INFO AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 4234

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ESTC, SF

SUBJ: LETTER OF ASSURANCE ON SOUTH AFRICAN URANIUM
ENRICHMENT

REF: STATE 228097

1. EMBASSY BRIEFLY DISCUSSED REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE
AGAINST APPLICATION OF EQUIPMENT DESCRIBED REFTEL FOR
URANIUM ENRICHMENT WITH ESCOM ACTING GENERAL MANAGER
VAN DER WALT. HE IS CONCERNED OVER PRECEDENT WHICH
WOULD BE SET BY SUPPLYING SUCH CERTIFICATION.
PRIOR TO MAKING FORMAL REQUEST, WE WOULD LIKE
ADDITIONAL DETAILS TO BE ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE RE-
LATIONSHIP TO US NON-PROLIFERATION POLICY.

2. URANIUM ENRICHMENT PROCESS IS BEING DEVELOPED BY SA
ATOMIC ENERGY BOARD AND SA URANIUM ENRICHMENT CORPORATION.
OPERATION EXPECTED TO BEGIN 1984. SA HAS PASSED A LAW FORBIDDING
ANY URANIUM ENRICHMENT PATENT OTHER THAN BY ATOMIC ENERGY
BOARD. ENRICHMENT PLANT AT AEB SITE PELINDABA NEAR PRETORIA
WAS VIEWED BY MEMBERS OF ERDA PHYSICAL SECURITY REVIEW
TEAM AUGUST 1975.

3. ESCOM, A GOVERNMENT-OWNED COMPANY FOR GENERATION AND
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DISTRIBUTION OF ELECTRICAL POWER, IS INVOLVED IN PRACTICAL

APPLICATION OF ATOMIC POWER, INCLUDING ERECTION OF POWER UNITS, THE ONLY ONES SO FAR CONTRACTED BEING KOEBERG FOR WHICH US ENRICHMENT SERVICES SCHEDULED FOR 1980 AND 1981.

4. VAN DER WALT POINTS OUT LEEDS AND NORTHRUP COMPUTER INTENDED AS SUPERVISORY POWER SYSTEM CONTROL. HE IS UNABLE TO VISUALIZE HOW SUCH A DEDICATED SYSTEM COULD HAVE APPLICATION IN ENRICHMENT PROCESS EVEN IF DIVERTED.

5. FOLLOWING PROBLEMS WHICH AROSE OVER KOEBURG PROJECT AND DELAYS IN SECURING EXIM GUARANTEES, WE FEAR THAT IMPOSITION OF CONDITIONS, NEED FOR WHICH CANNOT BE CONVINCINGLY EXPLAINED, WILL DAMAGE US COMMERCIAL PROSPECTS WITH ESCOM GENERALLY.

6. WE HAVE ALSO BEEN ASKED (STATE 230402) TO SECURE FROM SA AUTHORITIES NON-PROLIFERATION ASSURANCES COVERING 15 TAPE PREPARATION SYSTEMS TO BE IMPORTED BY AMERICAN MACHINE TOOLS, KEMPTON PARK (NEAR JOHANNESBURG) FOR RESALE WITHIN SA. WOULD APPRECIATE CLARIFICATION OF THIS REQUEST, E.G. DOES THE EQUIPMENT IN QUESTION HAVE A SPECIFIC APPLICATION IN URANIUM ENRICHMENT PROCESS OR DOES IT HAVE WIDESPREAD INDUSTRIAL UTILITY? WE FORESEE NO PROBLEMS SECURING NON-PROLIFERATION ASSURANCES FROM AEB FOR EQUIPMENT CONSIGNED TO IT, BUT DOUBT BOARD'S WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE BY PROVIDING ASSURANCES FOR WIDE RANGE OF EQUIPMENT BEING IMPORTED BY PRIVATE DEALERS IN SA FOR SUBSEQUENT RESALE. MOREOVER, IMPOSITION OF SUCH A REQUIREMENT ON PRIVATE IMPORTERS OF US EQUIPMENT, UNLESS SOME POTENTIAL CONNECTION TO URANIUM ENRICHMENT CAN BE ESTABLISHED, WOULD HAVE HIGHLY DETRIMENTAL COMMERCIAL CONSEQUENCES.
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